

Experience Must Be Balanced by Caution ([1 Cor. 10:1-22](#))

Paul reminded the experienced believers who were strong in the faith that they had better not grow overconfident in their ability to overcome temptation. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" ([1 Cor. 10:12](#)). Paul used the nation of Israel as his example to warn the mature believers that their experience must be balanced by caution. He gave three warnings.

First, he warned that privileges were no guarantee of success ([yv. 1-4](#)). Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the power of God, just as the Christian believer has been redeemed from sin. (In [1 Cor. 5:7-8](#), Paul had already related Passover to salvation.) Israel was identified with Moses in their Red Sea "baptism," just as the Corinthians had been identified with Christ in their Christian baptism. Israel ate the manna from heaven and drank the water God provided, just as Christians nourish themselves on the spiritual sustenance God supplies ([John 6:63, 68; 7:37-39](#)). However, these spiritual privileges did not prevent the Jews from falling into sin.

There are dangers to maturity as well as to immaturity, and one of them is overconfidence. When we think we are strong, we discover that we are weak. The strong believer who eats in the temple may find himself struggling with an enemy who is too strong for him.

Paul did not suggest in [1 Corinthians 10:4](#) that an actual rock accompanied the Jews throughout their wilderness journey, though some Jewish rabbis taught this idea. It was a *spiritual* rock that supplied what they needed, and that Rock was Christ. Sometimes the water came from a rock ([Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:7-11](#)) and at other times from a well ([Num. 21:16-18](#)). God provided the water.

Paul issued a second warning: good beginnings do not guarantee good endings ([yv. 5-12](#)). The Jews experienced God's miracles, and yet they failed when they were tested in the wilderness. Experience must always be balanced with caution, for we never come to the place in our Christian walk where we are free from temptation and potential failure. All of the Jews twenty years old and upward who were rescued from Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness during their years of wandering ([Num. 14:26ff](#)).

We can hear some of the "strong" Corinthians asking, "But what does that have to do with us?" Paul then pointed out that the Corinthian church was guilty of the same sins that the Jews committed. Because of their lust for evil things, the Corinthians were guilty of immorality ([1 Cor. 6](#)), idolatry ([1 Cor. 8; 10](#)), and murmuring against God ([2 Cor. 12:20-21](#)). Like the nation of Israel, they were tempting God and just "daring Him" to act.

Paul certainly knew his Old Testament, and his readers would recognize the events referred to. The "lusting" is found in [Numbers 11:4ff](#), the idolatry in [Exodus 32](#), and the fornication in [Numbers 25](#). The Israelites often tempted God, but perhaps [Numbers 21:4-6](#) was the reference Paul had in mind. For their complaining, see [Numbers 14](#) and [16](#).

This kind of sin is serious and God must judge it. Not only did some of these rebels immediately die (see [1 Cor. 11:29-31](#)), but those who remained were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. They were saved from Egypt but were not privileged to claim their rich inheritance. Paul was not suggesting that his readers might lose their salvation, but he was afraid that some of them would be "castaways" ([1 Cor. 9:27](#)), disapproved of God and unable to receive any reward.

I heard about a pastor who gave a series of sermons on "The Sins of the Saints." One member of the church, apparently under conviction, disapproved of the series and told the pastor so. "After all," she said, "sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the life of an unsaved person."

"Yes, it is," the pastor replied. *"It's worse!"*

We must not think that because the Jews were under the Law that their sins were worse than ours and therefore dealt with more severely. Sin in the church today is far more serious, because we have Israel's example to learn from, and we are living "at the 597 end of the ages." To sin against the Law is one thing; to sin against grace is quite something else.

Paul's third warning was that God can enable us to overcome temptation if we heed His Word ([yv. 13-22](#)). God permits us to be tempted because He knows how much we can take; and He always provides a way to escape if we will trust Him and take advantage of it. The believer who thinks he can stand, may fall; but the believer who flees will be able to stand.

Paul had already told his readers to "flee fornication" ([1 Cor. 6:18](#)); and now his warning is, "Flee from idolatry" ([1 Cor. 10:14](#)). He explained the reason why: the idol itself is nothing, but it can be used by Satan to lead you into sin. Idolatry is demonic ([Deut. 32:17](#); [Ps. 106:37](#)). To sit at an idol's table could mean fellowship ("communion, partakers") with demons. Paul was again enforcing the important doctrine of separation from sin ([2 Cor. 6:14-7:1](#)).

He used the Lord's Supper as an illustration. When the believer partakes of the cup and loaf at the Lord's table, he is, in a spiritual way, having fellowship with the body and blood of Christ. By remembering Christ's death, the believer enters into a communion with the risen Lord. In [1 Corinthians 10:18](#), Paul pointed to the temple altar and sacrifices as another illustration of this truth. The application is clear: A. believer cannot partake of the Lord's food (the Old Testament sacrifice, the New Testament supper) and the devil's food (the idol's table) without exposing himself to danger and provoking the Lord.

"Are we stronger than He?" ([1 Cor. 10:22](#)) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. "You may be stronger than your weaker brother," Paul intimated, "but you are not stronger than God!" It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God.